# **SENSITIVE**

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6 7			MUR: 6570	S	PH	SEC	
8			DATE COMPLAINT FILE	D: May 4, 2012	Ü		
9			DATE OF NOTIFICATION		8	S S	
10			DATE ACTIVATED: July	24, 2012	٥.		
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15	CO	MPLAINANT:	Scott Abrams, Campaign M	anager, Snerman	IOT		
16 17			Congress				
18 19	RES	SPONDENTS:	Berman for Congress and B official capacity as treasur		is		
20			Committee to Elect an Effect				
21			Congressman and Beverly	•	r, in		
22			her official capacity as tre		•		
23			Howard L. Berman				
24			Voter Guide Slate Cards				
25			Jerry Seedborg				
26			Seedborg Campaigns, Inc.				
27				·	2012 OCT	=	
28		LEVANT STATUTES	2 U.S.C. § 441a		2	SO	
29	AN	ID REGULATIONS:	11 C.F.R. § 109.20		4	C.2.3	
30			11 C.F.R. § 109.21		22	THE THE	
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35			1,0220		8		
36	I.	INTRODUCTION					
37		Complainant alleges that the Comm	nittee to Elect an Effective Val	ley Congressman			
38	("CEEVC"), an independent expenditure-only political committee, coordinated its expenditure						
39	for a slate card mailer supporting California Congressman Howard L. Berman with Berman and						
40	his r	his principal campaign committee, Berman for Congress ("Berman Committee" or the					

"Committee"), in violation of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the

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1 "Act") and Commission regulations. Complainant alleges that the coordination occurred through

2 a "common vendor"— political consultant Jerry Seedborg and two of his companies, Seedborg

Campaigns, Inc. and Voter Guide Slate Cards ("VGSC").

Respondents deny the coordination allegations. CEEVC asserts that the conduct prong of the coordination analysis is not satisfied because CEEVC was unaware that Seedborg had any involvement with the Berman campaign when it purchased advertising space on the VGSC slate card and Seedborg did not use or convey any information about the Berman campaign that was material to the creation of the mailer. The Berman Committee asserts that the Committee and Berman had no contact with CEEVC, VGSC, or Seedborg regarding the mailer and argue that the Complaint presents no evidence that non-public information about Berman's campaign was conveyed to CEEVC. Seedborg, Seedborg Campaigns, Inc., and VGSC also maintain that they did not use or convey any information obtained from the Berman campaign to CEEVC.

Upon review of the Complaint, Responses, and other available information, there appears to be no basis for concluding that CEEVC coordinated the slate card mailer with Berman or the Berman Committee. Therefore, we recommend that the Commission dismiss the claim that the Respondents violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a and close the file.

### II. FACTUAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

#### A. Facts

CEEVC registered with the Commission as an independent expenditure-only committee in December 2011. CEEVC's Statement of Organization includes a letter stating that, consistent with *SpeechNow.org v. FEC*, 599 F.3d, 686, 689 (D.C. Cir. 2010) (*en banc*), it intends to make independent expenditures and raise funds in unlimited amounts but will not use those funds to

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make direct or in-kind contributions to, or coordinated communications with, federal candidates
 or committees.

The Complaint alleges that CEEVC coordinated with Berman and the Berman

Committee in producing and distributing a slate card mailer supporting Berman's 2012 reelection campaign in California's 30th Congressional District. The Complaint alleges that political consultant Jerry Seedborg, the founder and principal of Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. and VGSC, has worked as a consultant or vender for both CEEVC and the Berman Committee. Compl. at 1-2. The Complaint asserts that Berman has a longstanding relationship with Seedborg and that the Berman Committee paid Seedborg and Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. \$132,200 from January to March 2012 for consulting and other services. 

Id. at 2. The Complaint alleges that Seedborg then began creating and producing pro-Berman slate cards for CEEVC through his other company, VGSC. 

Id. CEEVC's 2012 April Quarterly Report discloses a \$23,595 debt to VGSC for "slate mail."

The Complaint argues that the slate cards satisfy the three-prong test for coordination set forth in the Commission's regulations at 11 C.F.R. § 109.21. Compl. at 4. The Complaint contends that the "payment prong" is satisfied because CEEVC incurred a \$23,595 debt to VGSC for "state mail," which indicates that CEEVC paid for the communication. 

Id. The

Complaint asserts that the "content prong" is satisfied because the slate cards are "inherently

With regard to the "conduct prong," the Complaint argues that Seedborg and his companies,

'public communication[s]' that expressly [advocate]" the election of Congressman Berman.<sup>2</sup> Id.

As evidence of the "longstanding relationship" between Congressman Berman and Seedburg, the Complaint cites quotations from Congressman Berman's brother, Michael Berman, and his partner on Seedborg's company websites. Compl. at 1.

The Complaint does not attach the slate card at issue or provide any detail on how the language of the slate card contains express advocacy.

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Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. and VGSC, are a "common vendor" to the Berman Committee and 1 CEEVC. Id. The Complaint asserts that CEEVC retained VGSC as a "commercial vendor" to 2 produce the slate card within 120 days of Seedborg providing consulting services to Berman and 3 the Berman Committee. Id. at 5-6. The Complaint asserts that, as a consultant to the Berman 4 Committee, Seedborg "undoubtedly has been exposed to and has strategized about" non-public 5 information about the Berman campaign's "plans, projects, activities, or needs" that affected the 6 7 content and distribution of the CEEVC-funded slate cards, resulting in prohibited coordination. 8 Id. at 7. 9 The Berman Committee denies any involvement in the production and distribution of the 10 CEEVC slate card. The Berman Committee explains that it retained Seedborg and Seedborg 11 Campaigns, Inc. from November 2011 to March 2012 to administer its day-to-day operations. Berman Committee Resp. at 2. The Berman Committee asserts that VGSC has not served as a 12 vendor to the Committee during the 2012 election cycle and that the Committee did not have any 13 contact with VGSC, CEEVC, or Seedborg about the slate card. Id. The Committee contends 14 that the Complaint does not present any information to satisfy the conduct prong, including any 15 facts that Seedborg or his companies used or conveyed material nonpublic information about the 16 17 Barman campaign's plans, projects, autorities, or needs when the slate eard was created, produced, or distributed. Id. at 4. 18 19 In its Response, CEEVC also denies that the slate card was coordinated with the Berman 20 Committee. CEEVC explains that the main strategy for its print media campaign was to purchase advertising space supporting Berman on as many slate card mailers as possible, 21

including those commonly produced by for-profit commercial vendors in California. CEEVC

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- 1 Resp. at 2. CEEVC contacted VGSC to purchase advertising on its slate cards in February or
- 2 March 2012, but did not have initial contact with Seedborg regarding the slate card. *Id.* at 2.
- 3 E-mail correspondence attached to CEEVC's response shows that CEEVC elected to purchase
- 4 space on three slate cards that had been planned before CEEVC's contact with VGSC, for a total
- 5 cost of \$23,595. Id. at 3. CEEVC asserts that it was solely CEEVC and not Seedborg or VGSC
- 6 that chose the advertising messages to include on the state cards in support of Berman. Id.

Although CEEVC does not dispute that the payroent and content prongs of the coordination analysis are satisfied, it argues that the Complaint presents no evidence that the conduct prong was satisfied. *Id.* at 5. Like the Berman Committee, CEEVC contends that Seedborg conveyed no information about the Berman campaign's plans or needs that was used in the creation, production, or distribution of the slate cards, and that Seedborg played no role at all in creating the portion of the mailers that advocated in support of Berman. *Id.* The Response further notes that the Commission has expressly rejected a presumption of coordination solely from the use of a common vendor in the absence of evidence that a common vendor conveyed information about campaign plans material to the creation, production, or distribution of a communication. *Id.* (citing Coordinated and Independent Expenditures, 68 Fed. Reg. 421, 435-36 (Jan. 3, 2003) (explanation and justification) ("E&J")).

In a Respense submitted on behalf of Jerry Seeiborg, Seedborg Campaigns, Inc., and VGSC (the "Seedborg entities"), these Respondents also deny that the slate cards were coordinated. The Response explains that Seedborg worked for the Berman Committee from December 2011 through March 2012, handling mostly administrative matters and had no

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> CEEVC admits that the slate card "is a public communication that expressly advocates the election of a candidate for federal office." CEEVC Resp. at 4.

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- 1 knowledge of or involvement in Berman's slate mail strategy. Seedborg Entities Resp. at 2.
- 2 The Response explains that, after leaving the Berman Committee, Seedborg turned his focus to
- 3 his 20-year-old company VGSC and was subsequently contacted by CEEVC to purchase
- 4 advertising space on the VGSC slate card. Id. The Response states that Seedborg and his
- 5 companies did not convey any information obtained from the Berman Committee or have any
- 6 role in selecting the text of the advertisement supporting Berman. Id. The Response asserts that
- 7 the timing and distribution of the sinte cards was predetermined by VGSC before being contacted
- 8 by CEEVC and was not affected by CEEVC's purchase of advertising space. *Id.* at 5. The
- 9 Seedborg entities argue that in the absence of evidence that the Seedborg entities used or
- 10 conveyed any information obtained from the Berman Committee in creating or distributing the
- 11 slate card, there is no violation. Id.

## B. Analysis

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The issue presented in this matter is whether the slate cards paid for by CEEVC were independent expenditures or whether they were coordinated with the Berman Committee, such that CEEVC made, and the Berman Committee accepted, an excessive contribution. The Act provides that no person shall make contributions to any candidate and his or her authorized political committee with respect to any election for foderal affics which, in the aggregate, exceed \$2,000.<sup>5</sup> 2 U.S.C. § 441a(a)(1)(A); see SpeechNow.org, 599 F.3d at 696; Advisory Op. 2010-69 (Club for Growth); Advisory Op. 2010-11 (Commonsense Ten). The Act also provides that no

The Response notes that Seedborg did not provide any of the services enumerated in the Commission's regulations to qualify as a "common vendor" to the Berman Connnittee because Seedborg's role was primarily administrative. Seedborg Entities Resp. at 5.

After indexing for inflation, the individual contribution limit to candidates and candidate committees for the 2012 election cycle is \$2,500. Price Index Adjustments for Contribution and Expenditure Limits and Lobbyist Bundling Disclosure Threshold, 76 Fed. Reg. 8368, 8370 (Feb. 14, 2011).

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- candidate or political committee shall knowingly accept a contribution in excess of the contribution limitations. 2 U.S.C. § 441a(f).
  - The Act provides that an expenditure made by any person "in cooperation, consultation, or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of" a candidate or his authorized committee or agent is a contribution to the candidate. See 2 U.S.C. § 441a(a)(7)(B)(i). A communication is coordinated with a candidate, an authorized committee, a political party committee, or an agent thereaf if it meets a three-part test: (1) it is paid for, in whole or in part, by a third party (a person other than the candidate, authorized committee, or potitical party committee); (2) it satisfies at least one of the five "content" standards described in 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(c); and (3) satisfies at least one of the six "conduct" standards described in 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(d).

    11 C.F.R. § 109.21(a). In contrast, an independent expenditure is an expenditure by a person for a communication expressly advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate that is not made in cooperation, consultation, or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of a candidate, a candidate's authorized committee, or their agents, or a political party committee or its agents. 2 U.S.C. § 431(17); 11 C.F.R. § 100.16.

#### 1. Payment

The payment prong is satisfied because CEEVC, a third party payor, paid VGSC a total of \$23,595 to purchase advertising space on the slate cards. This amount was initially disclosed as a debt on CEEVC's 2012 April Quarterly Report. In its 2012 July Quarterly Report, CEEVC disclosed disbursements to VGSC totaling \$23,595 on May 29, 2012 for independent expenditures in support of Howard Berman.

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#### 2. Content

The content prong is satisfied if the communication at issue meets at least one of the following content standards: (1) a communication that is an electioneering communication under 11 C.F.R. § 100.29; (2) a public communication that disseminates, distributes, or republishes, in whole or in part, campaign materials prepared by a candidate or the candidate's authorized committee; (3) a public communication that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for federal office; (4) a public communication, in rolevant part, that refers to a clearly identified House or Senate candidate, and is publicly distributed or disseminated in the clearly identified candidate's jurisdiction 90 days or fewer before the candidate's primary election; or (5) a public communication that is the functional equivalent of express advocacy. See 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(c). The term "public communication" encompasses broadcast, cable or satellite communication, newspaper, magazine, outdoor advertising facility, mass mailing or telephone bank, or any other form of general public political advertising. 11 C.F.R. § 100.26. Although the Complaint did not include the text of any of the slate cards at issue, the Seedborg entities' Response includes a copy of one of the slate cards. See Seedborg Entities Resp., Ex. A. The slate card is titled "2012 Primary Election Recommendations" and the relevant text states: "CD30 U.S. Representative - HOWARD L. RERMAN\* - Democrats are uniting in support of Congressman Howard Berman! Howard Berman is endorsed by; Governor Jerry Brown, Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and Congressman Harry Waxman." Id. The slate card's disclaimer states, in relevant part: "Howard Berman's placement paid for by the Committee to Elect an Effective Valley Congressman, P.O. Box 14008, Van Nuys, CA 91409-4008, and not authorized by candidate or his committee." Id. The CEEVC Response

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- 1 attaches text sent by e-mail to VGSC that was apparently used for the slate cards targeted to
- 2 other groups of voters, including Latino voters and Republicans, which feature similar messages
- 3 about supporting Berman and listing Berman's endorsements. See CEEVC Resp., Ex. 4. As
- 4 noted above, none of the Respondents dispute that the content prong is satisfied, and CEEVC
- admits that the express advocacy content prong is satisfied. See 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(c)(3). The
- 6 content prong is also satisfied because the slate eards meet the content standard at 11 C.F.R.
- 7 § 109.21(c)(4).

#### 3. Conduct

Under the Commission's regulations, six types of conduct between the payor and the committee, regardless of whether there is agreement or formal collaboration, satisfy the conduct prong of the coordination standard: (1) the communication "is created, produced, or distributed at the request or suggestion of a candidate or an authorized committee," or if the communication is created, produced, or distributed at the suggestion of the payor and the candidate or authorized committee assents to the suggestion; (2) the candidate, his or her committee, or their agent, is materially involved in decisions regarding the content, intended audience, means or mode of communication, the specific media partlet used, the timing or frequency of the communication, or the size or prominence of a printed communication or duration of a broadcast, cable or satellite communication; (3) the communication is created, produced, or distributed after at least one substantial discussion about the communication between the person paying for the communication, or that person's employees or agents, and the candidate or his or her authorized committee, his or her opponent or opponent's authorized committee, a political party committee,

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- or any of their agents; (4) a common vendor who has a previous relationship (defined in terms
- 2 of nine specific services) with the candidate, the candidate's authorized committee, the
- 3 candidate's opponent or that opponent's authorized committee or a political party committee,
- 4 during the previous 120 days, uses or conveys information material to the creation, production,
- 5 or distribution of the communication; (5) a former employee or independent contractor uses or
- 6 conveys information material to the creation, production, or distribution of the communication;
- 7 and (6) the dissemination, distribution, or republication of campaign materials. 11 C.F.R.
- 8 § 109.21(d)(1)-(6).

The Complaint specifically alleges that CEEVC and the Berman Committee coordinated CEEVC's expenditure for the slate cards through common vendor Jerry Seedborg and his companies, Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. and VGSC. The common vendor analysis has three parts under the Commission's regulations.

First, the person paying for the communication, or an agent of such person, must contract with or employ a "commercial vendor" to create, produce, or distribute the communication.

11 C.F.R. § 109.21(d)(4)(i). "Commercial vendor" is defined as any person providing goods or services to a candidate or political committee whose usual and normal business involves the sale, rental, lease, or provision of those goods an services. 11 C.F.R. § 116.1(c). Here, the first part of the common vendor analysis is satisfied because CEEVC contracted with VGSC to produce and distribute the slate cards. VGSC is a commercial vendor as defined in the Commission's regulations, as its website advertises its business of producing and distributing slate cards

A "substantial discussion" includes informing the payor about the campaign's plans, projects, activities, or needs, and that information is material to the creation, production, or distribution of the communication. See 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(d)(3).

The last standard applies only if there was a request or suggestion, material involvement, or substantial discussion that took place after the original preparation of the campaign materials that are disseminated, distributed, or republished.

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- 1 through direct mail in the state of California for the past 25 years. See
  - www.voterguideslatecards.com.
- 3 Second, the commercial vendor, including any owner, officer, or employee of the 4 commercial vendor, must provide any of nine specific services to the candidate who is clearly 5 identified in the communication, or the candidate's authorized committee, the candidate's 6 opponent, the opponent's authorized committee, or a political party committee during the 7 previous 120 days. The succific services are: development of unedia strategy, including the 8 selection or purchasing of advertising slots; selection of audiences; polling; fundraising; 9 developing the content of a public communication; producing a public communication; 10 identifying voters or developing voter lists, mailing lists, or donor lists; selecting personnel, 11 contractors, or subcontractors; or consulting or otherwise providing political or media advice. 12 11 C.F.R § 109.21(d)(4)(ii).

The available evidence does not definitively establish that Seedborg and his companies provided any of the listed services to Berman or the Berman Committee during the 120 days before CEEVC contracted with VGSC to produce the slate cards. The Complaint argues that this part of the common vender analysis is satisfied because Seedborg was a consultant to the Berman Committee send in this role was "undoubtedly" involved in "developing the content of a public communication; producing a public communication; . . . developing voter lists or mailing list [sic]," but the Respondents dispute this characterization. Compl. at 6-7. The Responses from the Berman Committee and the Seedborg entities assert that Seedborg was retained as an independent contractor to the Berman Committee from December 2011 to March 2012, which appears to fall within the 120 day window before CEEVC contracted with VGSC to produce and

Seedborg is identified on VGSC's website as the founder of both VGSC and Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. See.http://nww.voterpuides/streards.com/abnut.htmd.

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- distribute the slate cards. See Berman Committee Resp. at 2; Seedborg Entities Resp. at 2;
- 2 CEEVC Resp. at 2-3. However, both the Seedborg entities and the Berman Committee
- 3 characterize Seedborg's role with the Berman Committee as "administrative," which is supported
- 4 by the Committee's characterization of disbursements to Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. from
- 5 December 27, 2001, through March 20, 2012, for "administrative services" on its disclosure
- 6 reports. See Berman Committee Resp. at 2; Seedborg Entities Resp. at 2, 5. Therefore, without
- additional information, it is unclear whether Seedborg and Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. provided
- 8 any of the specific services listed in the regulation to Berman or the Berman Committee.

Third, the common vendor must use or convey (1) information about the campaign plans, projects, activities, or needs of the clearly identified candidate, the candidate's opponent, or a political party committee, and that information is material to the creation, production, or distribution of the communication; or (2) information used previously by the commercial vendor in providing services to the candidate who is clearly identified in the communication, or the candidate's authorized committee, the candidate's opponent, the opponent's authorized committee, or a political party committee, and that information is material to the creation, production, or distribution of the communication. The third part of the analysis is not satisfied if the information used or conveyed by the communical vendor was obtained from a publicly available source. 11 C.F.R § 109.21(d)(4)(iii).

Here, all of the Respondents directly deny that Seedborg, Seedborg Campaigns, Inc., or VGSC used or conveyed information to CEEVC about the Berman campaign's plans, projects, or needs that was material to the creation, production, or distribution of the slate cards. Although the Responses are unsworn, the Complaint does not present any allegations of specific conduct, and we did not locate any publicly available information, including any press accounts, which

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in the coordination regulation.

assert any influence by the Berman Committee or any conveyed information. As several of the Respondents note, during the 2002 coordination rulemaking, the Commission specifically rejected the idea that use of a common vendor alone would establish a "presumption of coordination." Instead, the regulation "focuses on the sharing of information . . . through a common vendor to the spender who pays for a communication that could not then be considered to be made 'totally independently' from the candidate." See E&J, 68 Fed. Reg. at 436. Given the conclusory nature of the Compleint's allegations regarding the conveyance of information by a common vendor, the Complaint is essentially relying on a presumption of coordination, precisely the inferential leap the E&J disfavors. Accordingly, we do not believe the allegations are sufficient to find reason to believe a common vendor conveyed information as contemplated

Moreover, the Complaint does not allege, and the available information does not indicate, that the other tests for the conduct prong at 11 C.F.R § 109.21(d) were satisfied. Both CEEVC and the Berman Committee deny, albeit in unsworn Responses, that the Berman Committee or Berman had any knowledge of, or involvement with, the slate cards, and there is no information to suggest otherwise. There is no available information indicating that the slate cards were created at the request or suggestion of the Berman Committee, that the Berman Committee was materially involved in the content or distribution of the slate cards, or that the slate cards were created after a substantial discussion about the communication between representatives of CEEVC and the Berman Committee. There is also no allegation that the slate cards republish Berman Committee campaign materials. Finally, although Seedborg was previously engaged as an independent contractor by the Berman Committee from December 2011 to March 2012, the Complaint does not allege, and the available information does not indicate, that the

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communication was paid for by Seedborg or an employer of Seedborg. Accordingly, the former employee/independent contractor conduct prong is not satisfied.

Given the conclusory nature of the Complaint – made without personal knowledge or reference to supporting evidence – and the lack of information available from any other source that would support a reasonable inference that the activities here may have been coordinated within the meaning of the regulations, we conclude that the Commission lacks a sufficient basis to find that a violation occurred.

Accordingly, we recommend that the Commission dismiss as a matter of prosecutorial discretion the Complaint's allegation that Berman for Congress and Bruce Corwin, in his official capacity as treasurer, Howard L. Berman, the Committee to Elect an Effective Valley Congressman and Beverly Grossman Palmer, in her official capacity as treasurer, Jerry

- 12 Seedborg, Seedborg Campaigns, Inc., and Voter Guide Slate Cards violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a.9
- 13 See Heckler v. Chaney, 470 U.S. 821 (1985).

#### 14 III. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Dismiss the allegation that Berman for Congress and Bruce Corwin, in his official capacity as treasurer, violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;
- 2. Dismiss the allegation that Howard L. Berman violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;
- 3. Dismiss the allegation that the Committee to Elect an Effective Valley Congressman and Beverly Grossman Palmer, in her official capacity as treasurer, violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;
- 4. Dismiss the allegation that Jerry Seedborg violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;
- 5. Dismiss the allegation that Seedborg Campaigns, Inc. violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;
- 6. Dismiss the allegation that Voter Guide Slate Cards violated 2 U.S.C. § 441a;

See LaBotz v. FEC, \_\_ F. Supp. 2d \_\_, Civ. No. 11-1247, at 15-16 (D.D.C. Sept. 5, 2012) (slip. op.) (holding that the Commission lacked "substantial evidence" to conclude no reason to believe but may have dismissed allegations in its prosecutorial discretion).

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1 2	7. Approve the attached Factual and	d Legal Analyses:
3		
4	8. Approve the appropriate letters;	and,
5	9. Close the file.	
6	9. Close the file.	
7 8		Anthony Herman
9		General Counsel
10		Conorai Coursoi
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12		
13	10/22/12	
14	Date	Damed A. Petalas
15		Associate General Counsel
16		for Enforcement
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19		Kasey S. Morgenhe
20 21		Kasey S Morgenheim
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